Dr Michael Bourke MBBS OAM

18/8/1936-6/1/22

Michael was born to Michael and Mollie Bourke of Pakenham and was the fifth of eight children. The children were raised in what was then a rural community, next to the racecourse, which his father and uncle established. Michael rode his horse to school each day. He was educated at St Patrick’s Pakenham before following the family tradition and joining his older brothers at St Patrick’s College in Ballarat. Michael boarded for 5 years and was Dux of his class in 1954. Michael matriculated twice as he was young for his year and was uncertain of his career path.

Michael studied Medicine at Melbourne University and St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne, and resided at Newman College where he made many lifelong friends. A mutual acquaintance introduced Michael to Thérèse Monahan (formerly from Echuca) at the Green Shop of St Vincent’s. Thérèse was a second year nursing student and Michael a fourth year Medical student when they met.

In 1960, Michael graduated from Medicine and completed his two year residency at St Vincent’s and one year at the Royal Women’s Hospital. During this time he gained valuable skills in obstetrics and gynaecology to equip him with his chosen path as a country General Practitioner. Following their marriage in 1962, at Newman College Chapel, Michael and Thérèse set about finding where they might settle.

During a Newman College Old Collegians Dinner in 1963, Michael met up with an old friend, Mario Croatto, who asked Michael to do a locum for him in Leongatha as he had been working long hours and had not had a holiday in two years. Michael agreed to this and following the birth of their first child, Michael and Thérèse returned to Leongatha and joined Mario in his practice. Michael and Mario formed a lifelong friendship, sharing common values in line with their Catholic faith. Over the following two years Michael and Mario amalgamated their practice with the other two doctors in town and the Leongatha Medical Group was established. The four doctors went on to work together for 28 years.

Michael was a very compassionate, capable and dedicated rural GP. He developed new skills on the job in all areas of GP including trauma, anaesthetics and palliative care. He learnt from his more senior partners and was also most appreciative of the input and guidance from various specialists who visited the town on a regular basis. He thrived on talking to patients from all walks of life, finding out about their lives and connecting people.

In 1984, Michael completed a Diploma in Geriatric Medicine which saw him retiring from Obstetrics and taking on the role as Regional Geriatrician. He enjoyed the change in work hours and more regular sleep patterns! Michael was a regular attendee at conferences around the district and enjoyed networking and updating his skills and knowledge.

On retiring from his practice in 2002 and knowing how difficult it was to obtain rural locums, Michael and Thérèse spent time travelling around rural Victoria supporting colleagues so they could have a break. On a three occasions, Therese and Michael travelled to Ireland and enjoyed three month working stints, which also gave them the opportunity to research the Bourke and Monahan families.

Michael was an active participant in many community groups. The roles he held over time included; Medical Officer, President, and Life Member of Stony Creek Racing Club, Chairperson of Woorayl Lodge Aged Care, Leongatha Hospital Committee, Medical Health Officer Woorayl Shire, Medical Officer Leongatha Football Club, and Chairperson St. Laurence’s Parish Council.

In 2019, Michael was awarded an OAM for services to rural medicine and the community. It was not the recognition he sought but he was both humbled and honoured. This was in addition to the Victorian Rural Doctors Award for 40 years of service and outstanding contribution to rural communities, awarded in 2005.

Of recent years Michael enjoyed regular lunches with some of his old Newman College and St Vincent’s colleagues, lamenting on how busy they were in their working lives and how wonderful it was to finally have time to socialise together.

Michael acknowledged the vital role Thérèse played in supporting him throughout his professional life along with raising their five children Gabrielle, Justine, David, Peter and Sarah. On-call life, before mobile phones, had Thérèse at home taking calls, triaging and seeking Michael from Mass or the local football match to attend the hospital. Theirs was a true lifelong partnership.

Michael is survived by Thérèse, his five children, their partners and 11 grandchildren.

Contributed by

Thérèse Bourke St Vincent’s RN 1956-1959 and Gabrielle Bourke RN 1982-1987

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